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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINS](#) [XY](#) [MR](#) [NG](#) [IV](#) [TO](#) [FR](#)
SUBJECT: MAURITANIA/NIGER/COTE D'IVOIRE/TOGO: MFA DAS
DISCUSSES KEY ISSUES

REF: A. NOUAKCHOTT 387
[1](#)B. JUNE 12 KANEDA-DEPARTMENT E-MAILS
[1](#)C. JUNE 8 PARIS POINTS

Classified By: Political Counselor Andrew Young, 1.4 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: MFA DAS Christine Fages on June 12 urged the U.S. to pressure deposed Mauritanian President Abdallahi to sign and work to implement the recently brokered political accord, an issue that Senegal's FM Gadio would likely raise during his June 12 meetings in Washington. Fages responded "no comment" when asked if junta leader Aziz was visiting or planning to visit Paris. Fages said the French were not comfortable with Nigerien President Tandja's attempt to secure a third term but were limited in their ability to criticize him publicly. Fages believed it possible that Cote d'Ivoire's President Gbagbo could postpone the November 29 elections. If the elections are postponed, Fages said she would push for a complete withdrawal of France's Operation Licorne. On Togo, Fages said that President Faure needed to allow, if not encourage, the opposition's participation in the upcoming presidential election and that opposition leader Gilchrist Olympio needed to engage actively in the process rather than find a pretext for remaining aloof, as has been his habit. Fages said the GOF would soon invite Department and DOD officials, along with other experts, to Paris for talks on the Sahel during the September-October period. END SUMMARY.

MAURITANIA

[1](#)2. (C) MFA West Africa DAS-equivalent Christine Fages on June 12 discussed current key issues, beginning with Mauritania. She said that France supported the recent political agreement the Senegalese had helped broker in Dakar. Implementing the accord as effectively and as soon as possible was of high importance -- "it has taken months to get here and we can't afford a setback or being forced to start over again." In this regard, she said it was imperative to secure deposed President Abdallahi's agreement and cooperation. Referring to matters discussed in Ref A, she said that by raising new conditions outside the framework of the accord, Abdallahi risked undoing it.

[1](#)3. (C) As reported Ref B, Fages said that FM Gadio of Senegal was now visiting Washington and that he would likely raise with USG officials Abdallahi's refusal to sign the accord or assist in its implementation. Fages hoped that the U.S. would express its understanding and support to Gadio and that the U.S. would then communicate to Abdallahi the need for him to get on board. "The U.S. has been the most supportive of everybody regarding Abdallahi, so he's likely to listen to you," Fages observed. "We hope that Secretary Clinton gets involved and conveys this message herself to Abdallahi. There is no alternative to the Dakar-brokered

accord, and we must implement it."

¶4. (C) We asked Fages about rumors that junta leader Aziz was or would soon be in Paris. She offered an abrupt "no comment." She went on to say, "yes, I have heard those rumors too. There is nothing I can say about them. Sorry." (COMMENT: If Aziz were not here or planning to come here, she would likely have said "no." Her "no comment" therefore means that he is or will soon be here. If so, her tone and body language indicated that she opposed such a visit. END COMMENT.)

NIGER

¶5. (C) As had officials at the French Presidency (Ref C), Fages expressed frustration with Nigerien President Tandja's attempts to ensure a third term in office. She said that France was a bit limited in how strongly it could comment publicly -- "There have been other cases -- Biya, Campaore -- where constitutions were changed to allow leaders to stay in power. We and others didn't say too much then, so how can we get vocal about Niger?" Fages said that French comment had so far been limited to a call for respecting the constitution. "But their constitutional court has already said, in effect, that the constitution can't be amended, which is absurd. So that doesn't really go anywhere. Now the court will rule on the referendum Tandja wants to hold. In any case, the message we are trying to send to the populace is that, if there is a referendum, people unhappy with Tandja should go vote and not riot."

¶6. (C) Instability stemming from Tandja's maneuvers would be most unfortunate, Fages said, both for Niger and the region. It would likely increase AQIM's regional influence as well as exacerbate the Touareg problem in the north. Fages said that AQIM was probably becoming more of a danger because of the influx of cash it had received as a result of the ransoms paid in response to the kidnappings.

COTE D'IVOIRE

¶7. (C) We mentioned to Fages the comment offered by Romain Serman at the French Presidency (Ref C) that President Sarkozy's Secretary-General, Claude Gueant, had canceled a visit to the Cote d'Ivoire because there were indications that President Gbagbo did not intend to hold elections on November 29, as had been recently announced. Fages confirmed that Gueant would not go there. Without providing specifics, Fages said that the November 29 elections could be canceled or postponed. "He's not going to hold elections if he's not sure he'll win," she said, in reference to Gbagbo.

¶8. (C) For Fages, the key issue would be Operation Licorne's fate if the elections did not take place as scheduled. She said that she would advocate a full withdrawal of French forces, although this would have to be coordinated with the UN so that UNOCI would not be left in the lurch. "If there are even three French soldiers there, and if there is civil disorder or violence, the Ivoirians will go after our soldiers and French citizens. We don't want our soldiers to be an issue or a part of a conflict. Granted, if they are withdrawn and there is violence, we might have to send them back in as a rescue or security force. But I don't think they should be there should the Ivoirians start fighting amongst themselves over canceled elections."

¶9. (C) Fages said that Licorne had already drawn down to about 800 troops. A drawdown to 400 would be possible but a force of that size would not have much fighting power as there would be a higher proportion of support rather than combat elements. Fages noted that the only French forces in Cote d'Ivoire were those deployed in Operation Licorne. The former permanent French military presence no longer existed, with the French military in the process of closing shop pursuant to the restructuring of the bilateral defense and military cooperation agreements now taking place.

TOGO

¶10. (C) Fages said that Togo was another problem area. There was the still-unsettled business arising from President Faure's sacking of his brother Kpatcha and the question of whether Kpatcha or his hard-line supporters in the military would try to retaliate against Faure. The other problem was the upcoming presidential election. Fages said that Faure was mistaken in thinking that he was somehow in the clear politically simply by virtue of having held successful legislative elections. The presidential election would be a completely different issue. She said that Faure needed to understand that, for the presidential election to be accepted by the international community, there had to be meaningful participation by the opposition, i.e., Gilchrist Olympio. Faure needed to take an accommodating stance towards the elections and Olympio's participation.

¶11. (C) But, Fages continued, Olympio was often part of the problem. He always found reasons not to engage or to remain aloof. Fages said that Olympio had to become more realistic and to participate at some point -- time was not on his side.

Rather than accepting compromise that would allow him to participate, he always held out for a bit more and left empty handed when "more" did not come his way. Fages said that it sometimes seemed that Olympio did not really want to be president and instead wanted only to see the fall and destruction of the House of Gnassingbe. This was understandable given the two families' backgrounds but not helpful in terms of resolving Togo's problems.

SAHEL TALKS WITH THE U.S.

¶12. (C) Fages said that the GOF wanted to invite the USG to Paris for talks on the Sahel during the September-October period. These talks would include representatives from the Department, DOD, and the intelligence community, and could include as well experts on terrorism, narcotics, money-laundering, and related topics. Per one of our Ref B messages, we noted that Fages said that formal invitations would be extended once the French were informed that Vicki Huddleston had officially become DASD for Africa, succeeding DASD Whelan. Fages mentioned that the talks on the Sahel could be expanded at a later stage to include the UK.

PEKALA